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SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: POLLING DEMONSTRATES MAYORAL
INCUMBENTS' ADVANTAGE

REF: A. SAN SALVADOR 315
[1](#)B. SAN SALVADOR 458

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: With less than four weeks to go until nationwide municipal and Legislative Assembly elections, results of a CID-Gallup poll publicized in leading daily El Diario de Hoy indicate that the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) will likely win six departmental capitals, while the opposition Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) will carry four. The center-left Christian Democratic Party (PDC) will win two major city halls, and ARENA's center-right ally, the National Conciliation Party (PCN) will take one. ARENA and the FMLN are in a virtual dead heat for the "grand prize" of San Salvador. END SUMMARY.

The West

[1](#)2. The western departments of Ahuachapan, Santa Ana, and Sonsonate (the departmental capital cities of which are eponymous) include most of El Salvador's prime high-elevation coffee-growing areas. There are 41 municipalities in the area. In 2003, 19 municipalities in the region voted for ARENA, 7 for the FMLN and FMLN coalitions, and the remaining 15 municipalities were divided between the PCN, PDC, and CDU.

[1](#)3. With the backing of 38 percent of intending voters, Ahuachapan city's ARENA Mayor Rafael Antonio Moran leads all other candidates and will likely continue in office. In Santa Ana, Mayor Orlando Mena, who ran and won as an FMLN candidate in 2003, has since changed affiliation to the PDC-FDR-CD coalition formed during 2005. His high approval ratings have translated into a strong lead over the competition; 41 percent of Santa Ana voters intend to vote for Mena. Sonsonate's ARENA Mayor Manuel Arce died of a heart attack in December 2005, although 75 percent of those polled mistakenly believe that Arce still holds office. Among those aware of Arce's death, the department's currently-appointed ARENA governor and mayoral candidate, Roberto Aquino, is slightly favored. (Note: Salvadoran ballots bear the parties' symbols rather than candidates' names and/or photos; this would appear to offer an advantage to the ARENA candidate in Sonsonate. End note.)

The East

[1](#)4. The eastern departments of La Union, Morazan, San Miguel, and Usulután have experienced some of the nation's highest emigration rates; remittances from Salvadoran family members living and working in the United States are a major source of income in the area. La Union and San Miguel have long been characterized as among the country's most politically-conservative regions, while northern Morazan was the wartime "capital" of FMLN guerrillas.

15. In La Union, the incumbent ARENA mayor will not seek reelection; ARENA candidate Miguel Ahues Karra is the preferred choice of 23 percent of those polled. However, during poloff's recent visit to La Union, many locals predicted that the PCN's Angel Emerito Garcia might nonetheless prevail. In Morazan's departmental capital of San Francisco Gotera, PDC incumbent Mayor Carlos Hernandez's 34 percent support among those polled more than doubles the 14 percent of his nearest rival, ARENA's Amilcar Moreno. In San Miguel Department's eponymous capital city, popular PCN Mayor Will Salgado enjoys a commanding lead over all his opponents, and hopes his "coattails" will increase the number of PCN Legislative Assembly deputies. Usulután city's incumbent CD-FMLN Mayor Francisco Rivas has suffered low approval ratings, and will not seek reelection. Usulután's current frontrunner is ARENA's Guadalupe de Hidalgo, now polling at 22 percent, but her nearest competitor Francisco Meardi of the FMLN is garnering 16 percent, making the race too close to call given the 46 percent still undecided.

Central El Salvador

16. In 2003 elections, the FMLN carried five of seven central departmental capitals, the exceptions being Sensuntepeque (Cabanas Department) and San Vicente; FMLN mayors appear poised for reelection in at least three central departmental capitals. In San Salvador suburb (and La Libertad capital) Santa Tecla, incumbent FMLN Mayor Oscar Ortiz is favored by 33 percent of prospective voters--nearly twice the support of ARENA candidate Jose Madrid (17 percent), although 49 percent remain undecided. Chalatenango's incumbent FMLN Mayor Eduardo Coto likewise appears headed for reelection to a fifth three-year term, with approval ratings of 67 percent and a 10 percent lead over the ARENA candidate. Although

incumbent FMLN Mayor Leticia Rivas of Cojutepeque (Cuscatlan Department) maintains a relatively narrow lead (8 percent) over ARENA candidate Guadalupe Serrano, nearly half the population remains undecided.

17. However, in Zacatecoluca (La Paz), incumbent FMLN Mayor Italo Lievano's term in office received poor marks, which may explain why ARENA's Medardo Alfaro is the current front-runner with 31 percent of the vote, easily surpassing new FMLN candidate Raul Pineda's 12 percent support. The mood in San Vicente likewise appears to favor change, with ARENA challenger Enrique Jimenez (25 percent) and FMLN candidate Rigoberto Saravia (16 percent) both leading incumbent PDC Mayor Rafael Calderon, although 49 percent of prospective voters remain undecided. With Sensuntepeque's incumbent ARENA Mayor Rene Rodriguez stepping down, the race between ARENA's Edgar Bonilla and the FMLN's Vicente Rovira appears nearly even, but nearly 43 percent of the population are undecided. CID-Gallup polling in San Salvador reinforces the results of recent UTEC/CIOPS polling (see reftel B), indicating that a virtual tie exists between ARENA's Rodrigo Samoya (31 percent) and the FMLN's Violeta Menjivar (29 percent), with incumbent Mayor Carlos Rivas Zamora far behind with five percent. (Note: Rivas Zamora was FMLN when elected, but during 2005 changed political affiliation to the CD-PNL-FDR coalition. End note.)

Comment

18. COMMENT: Results from past elections show that Salvadorans tend to vote straight party tickets, and also usually favor incumbents. Incumbents have the lead in seven of the nine departmental capitals where an incumbent is competing. The elections appear much closer in the departmental capitals where there is no incumbent participation, although ARENA candidates in such races appear to have gotten a boost from President Saca's remarkable personal popularity.
Butler